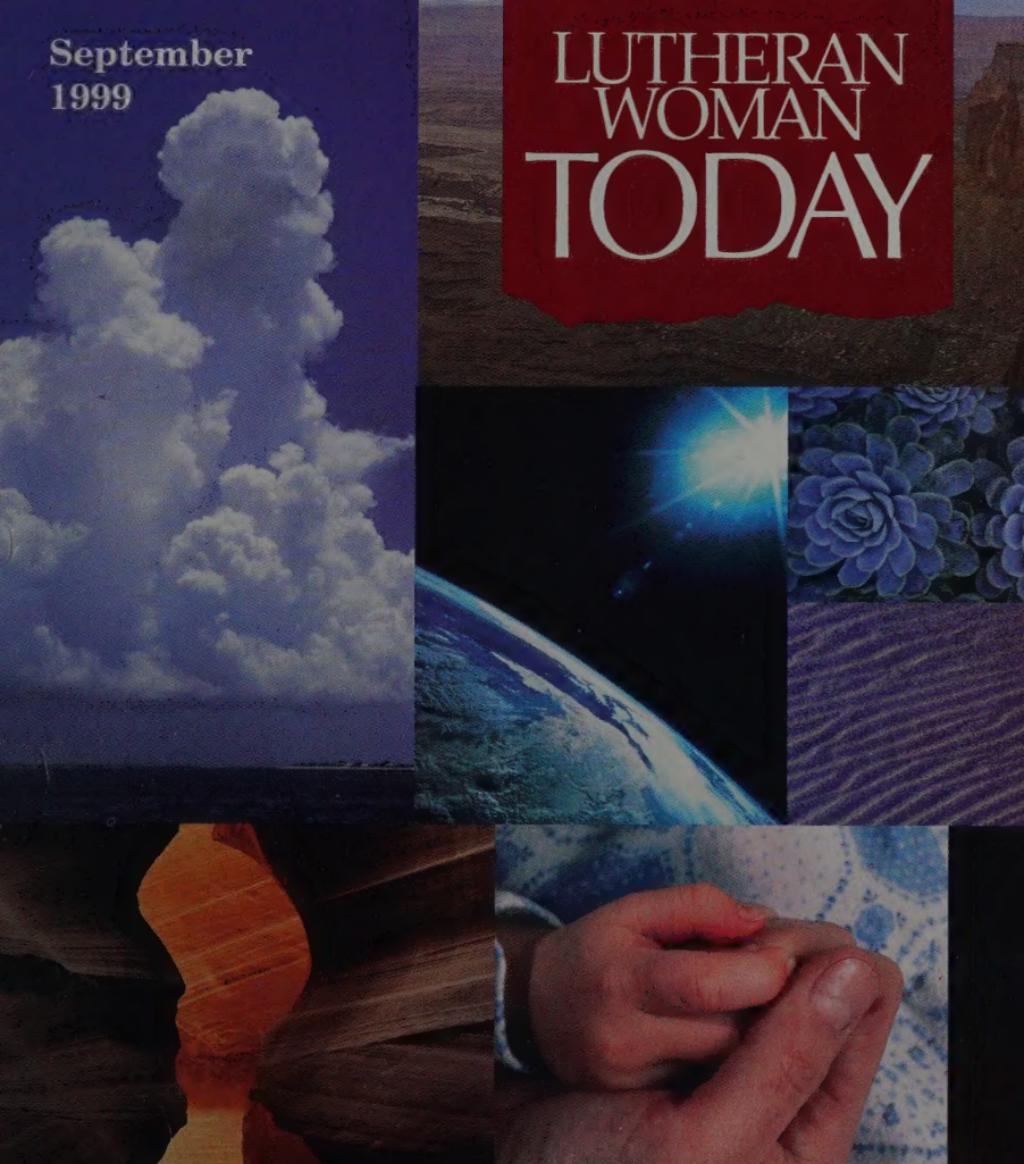


September  
1999

# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY



# In God's Image

*A Study of Genesis*

PROCESSED

JUG 24 1999

STUDY LIBRARY

INTRODUCING THE NEW BIBLE STUDY

## BRIEF PRAYERS ON NEWS ITEMS

*Sonia C. Solomonson*

Develop the habit of immediately praying for people as you read or hear the news. You might clip articles or pictures of those people for whom you pray—or even make a prayer book.

### AFRICAN AMERICAN HYMNAL ARRIVES

*This Far by Faith*, a new ELCA worship resource now available, offers “a living chronicle of a faith journey begun on African soil,” says the Rev. Karen Ward, ELCA associate director for worship. The new hymnal is a “proposal for addressing issues of worship from a perspective of a particular culture and at the same time being faithful to the worship patterns of the church through the ages,” she says.

*Thank you, Loving God, for diverse worship in our church.*

### END OF THE ECUMENICAL DECADE

According to Priscilla Singh, editor of the Lutheran World Federation’s *Women* magazine, “Ordination of

women has increased, as well as an increased networking of ecumenical women, that has added to our strength and brought about an increased and emphatic awareness that all is not well with the churches” following the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998).

*Help us, O God, to continue our commitment to use the gifts of all people in our churches.*

### ANGOLA’S WAR CONTINUES

Angola’s second city, Huambo, is surrounded by mine fields and has been encircled by the soldiers of a rebel movement. Thousands of people have been displaced around the nation. The Lutheran World Federation’s relief work was affected by the suspension of U.N. flights after two planes were shot down earlier in the year. LWF is concerned about the Angolans and about its staff.

*God of Life, be with the people of Angola and all parts of the world under siege and threat of war.* **LWFT**

*Sonia C. Solomonson is managing editor for The Lutheran.*

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# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

For growth in  
faith and mission

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"In God's Image"  
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Linnea J. West  
Wong for the  
Women of the  
ELCA Bible study  
on Genesis, a nine-  
session study  
beginning in this  
issue of LWT.

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## Dear readers of LWT,

It won't take you long to realize that there are, afoot in this issue, poetry ... and beauty ... and morning stars ... and creativity ... and praise to God.

### You'll see that ...

- "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" (p. 7). And that
- "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God" (p. 10). And that
- "The morning of the world" is upon us (p. 7), for we are entering the stunning world of Genesis and creation.

### Yes, it is September ...

- time for a new and most wonderful Bible study, *In God's Image: A Study of Genesis*, by Terence E. Fretheim (p. 25);
- time for the first September start of the Bible studies in LWT;
- time to see links between the *omega* book of Revelation we leave behind, and the *alpha* book of Genesis we embrace (p. 22);
- time to delight in both the human and nonhuman parts of God's creation;
- time to hear stories as some readers see God revealed in nature and through pets (p. 42);
- time to reflect on what "made in God's image" means, especially as

we teach and guide children (p. 4);

- time to follow God's Genesis command to be creative—as God is—and not "hide ourselves away in the lilacs" (p. 10);
- time, perhaps, to start that book club you've been wanting to (p. 33);
- time, as always, to praise God!

In June when we echoed the cry of Revelation 22, "Come, Lord Jesus," Sue Edison-Swift wrote of "Last things," "last times," and "things that last." So we come full circle, and on the eve of a new millennium we explore first things and basic things, like "The freedom of the First Commandment" (p. 20), science and faith in "The furnace of the stars" (p. 16), and the role of baptism (p. 36).



Marj Leegard (p. 19) reminds us that "September is a mind-set, a time that turns our lives around"

as we begin new projects, even new lives. As you immerse yourself in this new Genesis Bible study, your mind will be set to praise God and to delight in God's creation—of which each of us is such an inestimable part. **LWT**

*Praise God!*

*Nancy J. Stelling*

*Nancy J. Stelling  
Editor, Lutheran Woman Today*

**More than skin deep**

# Made in God's image

*David Engelstad and Catherine Malotky*

*God's love is alive in us.*



*Abbie (age 11) and Cara (age 14)*

We have the privilege of raising two daughters, ages 14 and 11. We hope they see in themselves what we see—that they are smart, sensitive, athletic, creative, playful, strong, caring, beautiful, and resilient. We want them to be happy, loving, and contributing human beings. We want them to know how much they are loved.

We know that there are plenty of things out there that will tell them—and other daughters and sons—other messages. We know that one day someone will mock them, someone will take advantage of a shortcoming, someone will cheat them or lie to them.

We try to inoculate them against these inevitable blows. We remind them that they are baptized, marked as children of God forever, something no one can ever take away. We remind them that it is God's opinion of them that really counts, because God is the one who created them and the rest of the universe. We remind them that God took the time and energy to form each of them, different from any other person, as a gift for the world. And we remind them of their responsibility to discover and live out who they have been made to be.

The theological shorthand for this belief is: "You are made in God's image." We are invited to believe that we each reflect God's own beauty and glory, patience and caring, kindness and creativity, forgiveness and mercy, tenderness and strength. On the other hand, this declaration also challenges us to discover how we as individuals reflect God's image, and then to defend this faith discovery against whatever forces would erode or negate it.

Many of us could say that when we were young we did not live in the awareness that we were made in the image of God. Our image of God was of someone who was popular, perfect, and powerful. Our idea of sin was that it was something that made us less than popular, perfect, and powerful. In fact, we often imagined that sin also made it hard to tell that we even resembled the God who made us.

We have heard the same messages our daughters are hearing. The fashion and diet industries encourage us to feel insecure about our beauty. Societal biases against strong women and gentle men may tempt us to withdraw rather than engage. We may struggle to be sensitive without being too emotional. We may pay a high price for being too caring, especially if we care for the "wrong type of people," those who are unpopular, weak, or "damaged."

It is hard enough to believe that we are created in God's image, let alone to reflect that image in all we say and do. Yet Jesus did exactly this. Jesus made time in his life for children, social outcasts, strangers, and sinners. In Jesus, we confess that we see the image of God quite clearly. We see someone who was both strong and loving, just and merciful, brave and vulnerable. We see someone who was tenaciously himself, and yet who gave himself away again and again. And we see someone who felt confident that who he was and what he did were reflections of the God who created and sustained him.

Whenever we yearn to be like Jesus, we can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work encouraging and inspiring us to live our own lives with the same confidence as Jesus. Indeed, the Holy Spirit's primary activity is to nurture in us a faith that is able to see—in who we are and in what we do—a reflection of the God who creates

*They are  
baptized,  
marked as  
children  
of God  
forever.*

*God's love  
calls you  
into the  
person  
you are.*

and sustains us. The psalmist ponders and then reflects this faith in the words:

“... what are human beings that you [O Lord] are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:4-5).

Mary, the mother of Jesus, gives voice to this same pondering faith: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (Luke 1:47-48).

When we feel a hunger to be loved and valued by God—and don’t we all?—this is the Spirit working to bring us more deeply into an awareness that we are made in God’s image. We are then loved into becoming and embracing that image. When we are awed by the beauty and intricate diversity that is the creation around us, this is the Holy Spirit helping us to see with God’s own eyes and feel with God’s own heart. And by the power of the Spirit, we remind each other: It is God’s hand, and no other, that formed you in your mother’s womb. It is God’s breath, and no other, that gives you life. And it is God’s love, and no other, that calls you into the person you are.

We teach our children that their lives are special, unique, and a reflection of God’s love within them. Sometimes they live in this awareness, but just as often this awareness recedes as they are engaged by the daily rhythm of their life. It is not so different for us, their teachers. We are no less prone to distractions and inattention. Yet, through the discipline of our faith, the encouragement of the community of believers, and the persistence of the Holy Spirit, we grow in our awareness that God’s love is alive in us.

Some of God’s mystery, love, and uniqueness is embodied in each of us. Together we help each other to honor, respect, call forth, and nurture this awareness in each other—we *are* made in the very image of God. LWT

*Catherine Malotky is a development editor at Augsburg Fortress; David Engelstad, her spouse, is a chaplain at Luther Hall.*

# When the morning stars sang together

(Job 38:7)



Terence E. Fretheim

Have you ever heard the stars sing?

In the hymn "Earth and All Stars!" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 558), we call upon the earth and the stars and the planets to "Sing to the Lord a new song!" We read in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." What do you think about when you sing that line in the hymn, or

read these texts from Job 38:7 and Psalm 19:1? Do stars actually sing and tell? Or is this figurative speech, or poetic license, or worshipful exuberance?

Another way of putting the question might go like this: Have you ever *seen* the stars sing? We've all seen the stars twinkle. On a crystal-clear night, away from the lights of the city, a look into the star-filled sky can inspire poets and fill us with wonder. But the *singing* of the stars is more than a matter of personal inspiration. Let's turn to Psalm 148 for another way of thinking about singing stars:

"Praise the LORD! ... Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! ... Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost ... mountains and hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! ... Young men and women alike, old and young together ... Praise the LORD!"



Not only do the stars sing, so does every creature in God's good creation. And what are they singing? They are singing the praise of God. We might wonder what sense this makes. We might even be offended that, in the call to praise God, human beings are on a list that includes creeping things and crab-apple trees! Certainly human praise means more than the clatter of hail on tin roofs or the clapping of the leaves of the aspen trees.

Perhaps, but not as much as we would like to think.

Perhaps we have such difficulty because we associate the praise of God only with words. Not a word is heard from the stars. But then we might remember that human beings also engage in wordless praise through, say, various forms of music and dance.

Two other kinds of biblical material may help us think about this. First, **language drawn from the world of nature is used to speak of God.**

We learn from Psalm 61:2-3 that God is "the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy" (see also Psalm 62:2, 6). Rocks can remind us of the strength and stability

that we find in God. In their own way, by being what they were created to be, rocks witness to God. That is praise! Psalm 61 also speaks of God in terms of the wings of a mother eagle, providing a safe refuge (verse 4; see Deuteronomy 32:11-12). As you watch the soaring eagle you may think of being borne along on the wings of God. By being what they were created to be, eagles witness to God. That is praise!

Second, we should also **remember that God has a special relationship with every creature**, not just human beings. Think of Psalm 50:10-11, where God says, "For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine." By being what they were created to be, these animals bear witness to their Creator who cares for every creature.

We might think of all the creatures called upon to praise God in Psalm 148 as a massive symphony orchestra. Each creature is like a different instrument in the orchestra, praising God each in its own way by being what it is created

to be. Just think of the immense variety of sights and sounds as you move from one corner of the creation to another! Each one contributes its witness to God.

Now think for a few moments about texts such as Genesis 1:28, where human beings are called upon to care for these various instruments in the orchestra of creation. What if one creature is incapacitated or missing altogether? What would the orchestra be like without, say, a trumpet or an eagle? That would mean that the scope and the variety of creation's witness to God would be less than what God created it to be. The heavens tell the glory of God less clearly on a smoggy day than on a bright, clear day. And so our care for the creatures of God's good creation can help assure that this orchestra's praise of God will continue to have its amazing depth and breadth.

Through our songs and hymns we help amplify the praise of all creatures. We live in a world highly charged with wonder and praise, and we can help give it voice. On the other hand, the world of non-human creatures may help us find our voices. Just think of all the references to nature in our hymns,

and how poor we would be without them! In fact, all these creatures may be models for our praise. In the hymn "Let All Things Now Living" (LBW 557) we sing, "Stars and sun obediently shine ... so we too should be voicing our love and rejoicing."

God needs both the human and the nonhuman for the fullest possible witness to God in the world. With the praise of as many creatures as possible, our mission to witness to our wonder-full God is given fuller voice. So, join your voices with those of the hills, horses, and hurricanes in the praise of God in all creation!

These lines by poet Gerard Manley Hopkins ("The Grandeur of God") help us capture this biblical witness:

*The world is charged with  
the grandeur of God.*

*It will flame out, like  
shining from shook foil;*

*It gathers to a greatness,  
like the ooze of oil*

*Crushed ...*

*There lives the dearest  
freshness deep down  
things ...*

*Because the Holy Ghost  
over the bent*

*World broods with warm  
breast and with ah!  
bright wings. LWT*

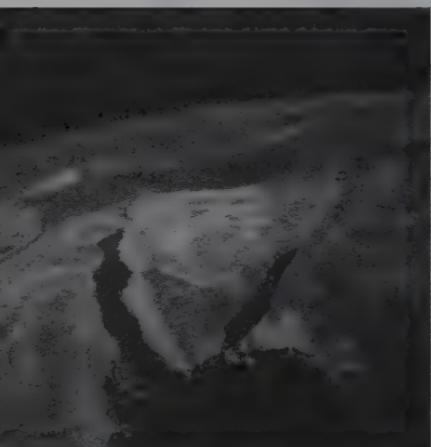


Terence E. Fretheim is professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. His new book, *About the Bible: Short Answers to Big Questions* (Augsburg Fortress, 1999), was drawn largely from articles in LWT.

*Exceedingly good!*

# God and human creativity

*Susan Palo Cherwien*



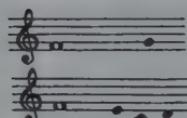
*At the beginning of God's creating  
of the heavens and the earth  
when the earth was wild and waste,  
darkness over the face of Ocean,  
rushing-spirit of God hovering over the  
face of the waters—God said ...*

*(Genesis 1:1-2)*

This following bit of writing is to be sung and played and folded into paper cranes. It is to be laughed and dusted with flour and prayed aloud. For we are called to create. From the first words of Genesis, the first revelation about God is: God creates. And we are called to do likewise.

"God said: Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness!" (Genesis 1:26). There—God said it. We can't run, dodge, or hide ourselves away in the lilacs. We are made in God's image. And God creates.

Very well, then. Let us take out our easels and our trowels and our band saws and create.

 O all you works of the / LORD,  
 O / bless the LORD.<sup>1</sup>

\* All quotations from the Hebrew Bible are from Everett Fox.

<sup>1</sup> *Benedicite omnia opera*, or "Song of the Three Young Men." All text quotations from the "Song of the Three Young Men" are from Joseph Gelineau, *30 Songs and Canticles* (Chicago: GIA, 1962).

God said: Let there be light! And there was light.  
God saw the light: that it was good.  
God separated the light from the darkness.  
God called the light: Day! and the darkness he called: Night!  
There was setting, there was dawning: one day.

(Genesis 1:3-5)

Light enables us to see. The creative light of God helps us to see *differently*. We see with the light of awareness. In God's creative light our eyes simply cannot speed past the sight of a dogwood budding forth. In the light of awareness our eyes actually demand to stop and gaze on the form of the tree. Not only do they take in its form, its greening shoots, its gray texture, its height and width, but the eyes of awareness see the pulse of creation in the tree's flowing sap. Such eyes see the holiness in God's good creation, each dogwood tree a revelation. This is the type of seeing that guides the skilled hands of a Georgia O'Keefe or a Frank Lloyd Wright. Perhaps such awareness will lead us to an artistic budding forth. At the very least, it will lead us into wonder.



Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries...<sup>2</sup>

Moses saw with a different light after his brush with the burning bush. He took off his sandals, for he knew

<sup>2</sup> From Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh" in *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1948), p. 16.

the place to be holy (Exodus 3). Jacob saw a vision of God after he had stretched out on the stony ground to sleep. He was never again the same. "Why, [the LORD] is in this place, and I, I did not know it!" (Genesis 26:18). Let us **take off our shoes**. Let us be aware. Let us see.

- Go for a walk and **notice shadows**, their shape and shade.
- Sit outside (or at a window) and **draw the spaces** created between three adjacent branches of a tree. Do not judge what you draw.



And you, nighttime and day,  
O bless the /LORD;



And you, darkness and light, O /  
bless the LORD.



*God said: let there be a dome amid the waters,  
and let it separate waters from waters!...  
It was so.*

*God called the dome: Heaven!  
There was setting, there was dawning:  
second day.*

*(Genesis 1:6-8)*



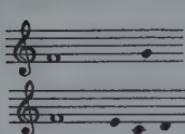
God created a vessel, an empty vessel, to hold in the waters below and to hold back the waters above. God created an empty space, useful precisely because it is empty. It is the empty space inside that makes the clay jar useful. It is the empty space inside the house that makes it a place to live. So, too, we need empty space within us: space for the rushing-spirit, space for the creative light of God, space for the forging and the making of our lives.

← These spaces we call margins are actually for your invisible thoughts, your poems, your sketches, a recipe, an idea for discussion, a garden plan. Empty space is full of possibility. →



Silence helps create empty space in us. Amid the chatter of daily life—sitcoms, news, traffic, phones, modems, meetings—we are full full full of sound. And so it is good, exceedingly good, to sit still in the silence awhile. To again allow some empty space in us. To again notice the still, small creating Voice.

- Carry with you a small **note-book** full of emptiness, in which to jot down thoughts, pictures, and ideas.
- **Describe** in words, drawn lines, colors, melody, or fabric the sound of falling water.



And you, heavens of the LORD, O bless the / LORD;

And you, clouds of the sky, O / bless the LORD.



*God said:*

*let the waters under the heavens be gathered to one place,  
and let the dry land be seen!...*

*It was so.*

*God called the dry land: Earth! and the gathering of the  
waters he called: Seas!*

*God saw that it was good ...*

*There was setting, there was dawning: third day.*

*(Genesis 1:9-10, 13)*

Now would be a good time to pop a peppermint into your mouth or brew a pot of coffee or light some incense.



For God created *matter*—land, plants, bodies. God formed dry land and brought forth wonders and delights. Wonders we can taste! Wonders we can smell! Dates, olives, oleander, roses. We are given form and given senses for awareness and delight. We are given hands to shape and to caress. We are given feet to dance. We are given lips to sing and tell stories and speak words of love. All this, from these beautiful, exceedingly good bodies God has created.

- Bake **bread**. As it rises, write down a memory of a favorite shared meal. As you smell the bread baking, sing or hum a hymn that uses the image of bread, such as *Lutheran Book of Worship* 197, 343, 409, or *With One Voice* 743, 753. Share the bread. Taste.
- Step outside at **dusk**. Close your eyes. What are the smells of twilight?



O let the earth bless the / LORD;  
And you, mountains and hills,  
O / bless the LORD.



*God said:*

*let us make humankind, in our image,  
according to our likeness!  
God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God did he create it,  
male and female did he create them.*

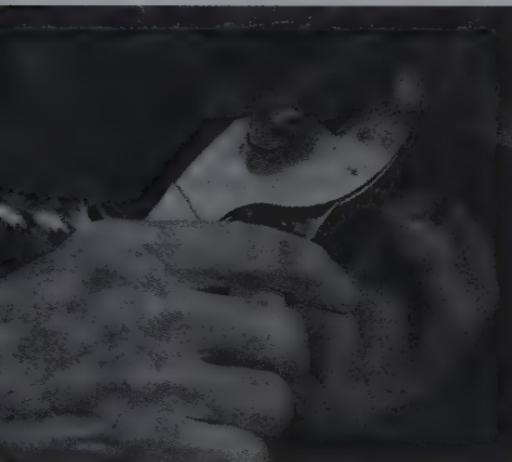
*God blessed them ...*

*Now God saw all that he had made,  
and here: it was exceedingly good!*

*There was a setting, there was a dawning: the sixth day.*

*(Genesis 1:26-28, 31)*

God blessed the humans: blessed their bodies, blessed their lives, blessed the work of their hands. If you are a grandparent, blessed are you in the telling of your story. If you are a farmer, blessed are you in the tilling of the soil. If you are a *pray-er*, blessed are you in the lifting of your hands. If a writer, in the smithing of words. If a road worker, in the laying of stone. All our creative works are hallowed and blessed in God, and welcomed by creation.



Having been created, we create. Having been given light, we see. Having been emptied, we are filled. Having been formed, we form. Having been blessed, we bless. And here: it was exceedingly good!

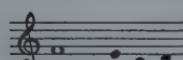
- **Shape** a piece of clay in your hands. Reshape it. Reshape it.
- **Notice the face** of a stranger. What sorrows, what blessings have shaped this face?
- Take a drop of olive oil and **anoint** yourself after a bath or shower. Make the sign of the cross on your forehead, heart, hands, lips, and other parts of your body, followed by the words: God blessed them. Now God saw all that God had made, and here: it was exceedingly good!



May you be blest, O LORD  
in the / heavens.



To you be highest glory and /  
praise forever.



A / men. LWT

Susan Palo Cherwien is a poet and musician. Her hymn texts appear in *O Blessed Spring* (*Augsburg Fortress*), as well as in *With One Voice* and several other denominational hymnals. She lives in St. Louis Park, Minn., with her spouse, David, and sons, Jeremiah and Benjamin.

# The furnace of the stars

George Koch



Nighttime, late fall: We are camping in woods miles away from the lights of the nearest town. Frost has already dropped the leaves from the trees; an explosion of stars can be seen everywhere I look. I point my finger at the horizon and arc it through Cygnus to Ursa Minor; the sky appears bowl-like. The stars hang in a domed *firmamentum*, supported by the distant hills. It seems that I am at the center of this universe.

Clouds come darkly from the northwest; snow emerges from that darkness. Cygnus can still be seen; flurries appear to fall from above the still visible stars.

Overnight the fast-moving snowstorm blows away to the south, leaving an inch of snow. Up with the dawn, light surrounds me; the sun is not yet visible this crisp fall morning.

Light, firmament, snow (precipitation) from above the stars. These are natural perceptions, like those of our ancestors. It is the biblical description of creation—light first (Genesis 1:3), a dome of heaven (Genesis 1:6), waters “above” the heaven (Genesis 1:7).

But even our ancestors were aware of anomalies. Daylight’s length ebbs and flows; overcast days have little light. Fog does not come from above. And five of the visible stars “wander” back and forth across the sky.

The ancients called these five objects (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) "planets" (from the Greek, *planasthai*, "to wander").

Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo revolutionized the world using the following scientific principles:

1. Do quantifiable (measurable) observations with standardized units of distance (kilometers), time (seconds), and mass (grams).
2. Do repeatable observation. (My cubicle is always the same height, no matter how often I measure.)
3. Measure only what is necessary. (The color of my cubicle does not affect its size.)
4. Based on observation, develop a theory, test it with further observation, refine and then retest.

Most importantly, *scientific theories only exist until they fail*. Even mature theories can be overturned by a new theory that observes the data in a different way (Einstein revolutionized Newton). In many ways science acts like the apostle Thomas: "Unless I see ... I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Nicholas Copernicus—a Polish priest—suggested that the planets' "wandering" could be explained by the sun as the center of the universe. Johannes Kepler—briefly a Lutheran pastor—discovered elliptical orbits for the planets. And with his discovery of moons circling Jupiter, Galileo put to rest the idea of the earth at the universe's center.

For many scientists, the trial of Galileo marks the "divorce" between faith and science. Galileo published his theories at a time when the Roman Catholic Church felt besieged by Protestantism. Even though Galileo was a faithful Catholic, the church saw Galileo's theory as a sign of further erosion of church authority, and repressed it, placing Galileo under house arrest in 1632.

On the surface, there still seems to be a split between science and faith. Some sincere Christians argue (based on calculations using biblical data) that the world is only 6,003 years old. This "young earth" theory works only by glossing over much of the significant scientific data from geology, paleontology, organic chemistry, and evolutionary biology.

It may seem sometimes that one must choose between faith and science. But we are not faced with an *either/or* choice here. We need to remember that Galileo was both a superlative scientist and a faithful Christian. Galileo argued that the Bible was not intended as a book of scientific theories, and that it could be considered allegorical when it conflicted with common sense. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, our expanding universe is billions of years old; carbon chains form the basis of life; and genetic complexity builds on simplicity. These are the best theories of how things happen, and they come from science.

But Galileo also knew that human life is more than just descriptive theories. We humans need meaning and purpose. Why are there stars? Why do we exist in the first place? What is the meaning of life? These are questions that faith tries to answer.

These two ways of seeing—science and faith—are not in competition but are complimentary. We humans are innately curious about how things happen. And science satisfies the curiosity for *how* the universe works. Science

has shaped the society we take for granted today. Who would ever want to go back to a world lit only by fire? At the same time, we need meaning and purpose—to know *why* things happen. And while we can find meaning for ourselves, ultimate meaning and purpose come from seeing things as God—the source of meaning and purpose—sees them. And this seeing is not *descriptive*, but *prescriptive*; “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good” (Micah 6:8).

So when we look at the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, we find God’s purpose. As I first learned in Sunday school, God declares the creation is *good*—not once, but seven times. The God who declared the creation good, has created me—and all who exist—in God’s own image. This is where I find my meaning.

I read the Bible for what it is—a Salvation Book, not a scientific book. For me there is not a conflict. If I want to know *how* I was created, I’ll stick to science. If I want to know *why*, I’ll stick to the word of God. **LWT**

*George Koch edits newsletters on faith and science. He is the deployed director for campus ministry, regions 5 and 6, for the ELCA.*

# Back to work

Marj Leegard



It's September. Back to school. Come home from the lake. Cancel the potato salad and begin to think pot roast. Fall reminds us that there is work to be done. All the activities that summer excused are back on the calendar again.

David sang in the Psalm 139: "You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and you know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven you discover my thoughts" (verses 1-2, Contemporary English Version).

We often visited Minnie in the retirement home. Minnie would push her wheelchair to the chest of drawers and color would explode from every drawer as she opened them. She had red and blue and white granny-squares for an afghan. Pink and cream and brown for another. Minnie crocheted, and she understood that her time was fed through the hook and yarn and intricate stitches of pattern—and came out as work well done. Translating time into shape and form is satisfying work.

Don bakes. He makes Swedish apple pies that draw record attendance when he invites a group for coffee. He bakes zucchini bread by

some secret method that makes his bread better than all the loaves the rest of us make from the same recipe. Don changed from well-tended husband to caregiver, and then to that stark word: alone. Don makes his house a home with work and a cookbook and courage.

September is more than a month. September is a mind-set. We make resolutions on New Year's Day, but it is September that turns our lives around. If God knows when I am resting and when I am working, the coming of winter reminds me I have been resting. In September work returns.

September reminds us to do the work we are called to do. What great projects await? Are you going to plan four vegetables and serve three fruits every day? Are you going to put visiting on your schedule? Are you going to study with a group? Are you going shopping for yarn or quilt fabrics?

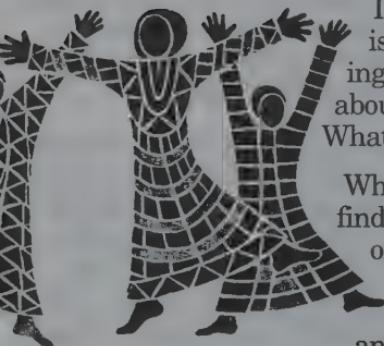
David ends Psalm 139 with these words: "Look deep into my heart, God and find everything that I am thinking. Don't let me follow evil ways, but lead me in the way that time has proven true" (CEV).

*Lord, you know all of your workers. You know all of our thoughts. Lead us in the way, the old time-tested way. Amen.* **LWT**

*Marj Leegard lives in Detroit Lakes, Minn. Twenty-five of Marj's favorite columns from LWT appear in her new book, Give Us This Day (Augsburg Fortress, 1999).*

# The freedom of the First Commandment

Lois Malcolm



I do not usually think of myself as a polytheist—a believer in many gods—until I begin asking myself some hard questions: What do I think about most of the day? What claims my attention? What compels me to do the kinds of things I do?

When I answer these questions honestly, I often find that my energies and attention tend to focus on people and things that are in some way limited. These things are not God. Not that they are bad in themselves. Being loved by others, and having a good reputation, success, and financial security—these are all natural, human desires. But they become false desires when they define my identity, when they come *before* God in my life.

*“... you shall have no other gods before me”  
(Exodus 20:3).*

Our God—the one who created us and calls us in the First Commandment to have no other gods—is the benevolent and life-sustaining *YHWH*<sup>1</sup> whose tender care creates order out of the chaos of our lives—both internally and externally. The commandment to have no other gods is freeing and life-sustaining.

The First Commandment needs to be linked with the memory and hope of God’s promised rule over creation. As Christians, our guarantee that God’s justice and mercy have the final word is the promise that “nothing—neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-40).

When we embrace the full integrity of God’s promise we find that we have, here and now, a foretaste of its fulfillment. In Martin Luther’s words: “For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself, is, I say, really your God.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Tetragrammaton—the Hebrew word for God’s name that was so sacred, it couldn’t be said aloud.

<sup>2</sup> *The Large Catechism (1529), The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959).

When God is the God of our thoughts and desires, we have a taste of what it means to live in a world of God's justice and mercy. However, keeping the First Commandment involves risk. It is an act of faith to affirm, with Luther, that only God can satisfy and help us out of our every need.

The other gods we might set our hopes on—wealth, reputation, relationships—only bring more anxiety and insecurity, more chaos, for they have neither the power nor the personal interest in our welfare that God has. When we place our final trust in them, we either (1) seek power over other people so that we can have these goods for ourselves or (2) we seek the approval of others, sacrificing our personal dignity to get whatever has hooked us. The result? A limited vision of what life can be. At best, we live a life controlled by trivial needs and concerns. At worst, we act out behavior that destroys other people or ourselves.

But the First Commandment leads to a kind of ecstasy—the joy of being drawn out of ourselves and into a new future. We are able to see that the many gods clamoring for our attention have no real

power over us. Not that we escape any of life's sufferings or responsibilities; indeed, both often increase when we take God's promises seriously. But we can face these, trusting that the God who gave us life will be present in each moment of our lives. And as we do so, we open every moment of our lives to the possibility of God's healing, forgiving, and creative power. We are then like mothers in childbirth. There may be pain, but our groaning is hopeful as we await the full completion of God's work.

Nor are we alone in this. As Saint Paul says, even though we do not know how to pray, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with sighs too deep for words. With the Spirit searching our hearts and interceding for us, we are confident of healing, forgiveness, and new life.

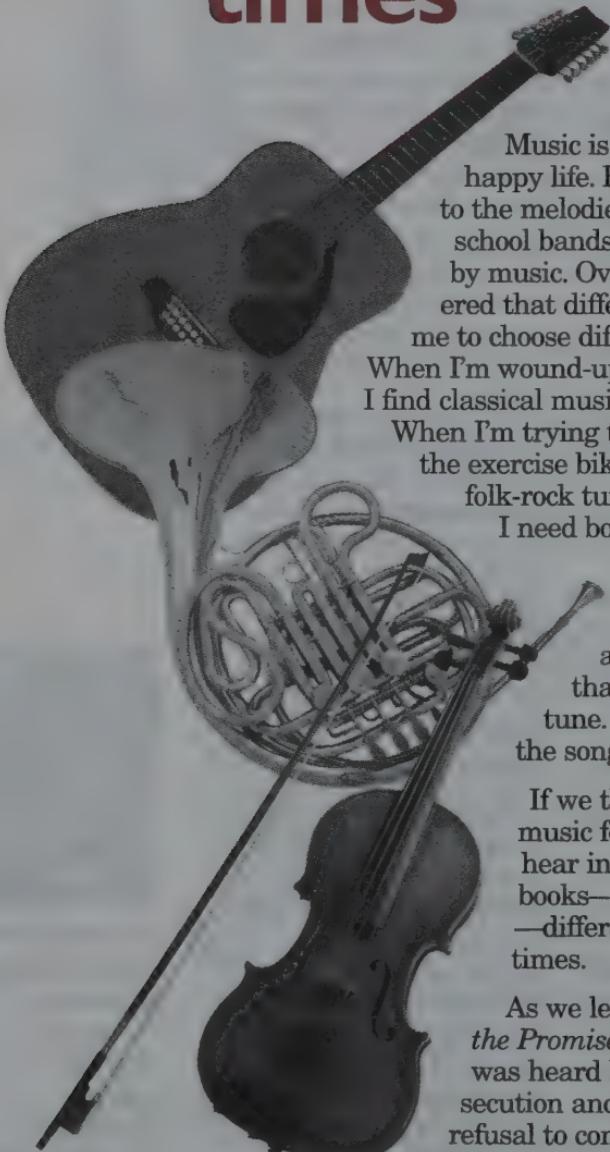
We can cling—in every decision, relationship and event—to the promise of God's goodness. Then we proclaim, with the psalmist, that God's law is: "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). **LWT**



*Lois Malcolm is an associate professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.*

# Different songs for different times

*Gwen Sayler*



Music is essential for a healthy, happy life. From the songs of birds to the melodies of orchestras or high-school bands, our lives are enriched by music. Over the years, I've discovered that different experiences lead me to choose different kinds of songs.

When I'm wound-up and need to relax, I find classical music particularly helpful.

When I'm trying to build up speed on the exercise bike at the gym, I turn to folk-rock tunes with a lively beat.

I need both kinds of music. If I lacked one, my life would be incomplete.

Sometimes I sing along. It doesn't matter that I'm usually out of tune. The music carries the song.

If we think of the Bible as music for the spirit, we can hear in its "alpha" and "omega" books—Genesis and Revelation—different songs for different times.

As we learned in the *Secure in the Promise* Bible study, Revelation was heard by Christians facing persecution and even death for their refusal to compromise with Roman religion and ways. Revelation's music reflects their experiences in that terrifying

situation. If we could "hear" Revelation as music, some of it would sound as if it was written in a key with seven flats: heavy, complex, and troubling to many of us. Other parts would sound lively and bright, celebrating the conviction that God's justice will be done and *shalom* will become a reality on the new earth. These Revelation songs touch our spirits deeply with healing, hope-giving power.

In many ways, listening to Revelation is an exhausting roller-coaster ride, taking us from the depths of despair to the heights of hope at an often dizzying pace.

As we shall see with *In God's Image*, the Bible study that begins this month, Genesis was written for Jewish communities whose experiences differed from those of the Christians addressed in Revelation. Different experiences lead to different kinds of songs. In contrast to the complicated keys of Revelation, all of Genesis might sound as though it is written in a simple, easy-to-follow major key with few sharps or flats. Unlike the cacophony of complex visionary voices in Revelation, Genesis invites us to listen to the voice of a story. Genesis asks us to

hear through the story of our ancestors the music God calls us to share with the world.

While Revelation sings the dangers of life in this world, Genesis sings the goodness of creation and calls humans to be responsible stewards of the earth God created. While Revelation sings of God's final judgment and of the new heaven and earth, Genesis sings of God's never-ending patience with creation and God's commitment to work through the often out-of-tune, discordant notes of human sinfulness to orchestrate a symphony of blessing in the world as it is.

While Revelation sings of victory for the faithful and judgment against compromisers and Roman oppressors, Genesis sings of the interrelatedness of all humanity. God's openness to those outside the immediate family of Israel forms minor melodies running through the entire book: the foreigner Hagar names God; God proclaims that her son Ishmael will be the ancestor of the Arabs; Egypt and the rest of the world are saved from famine by Joseph's wisdom.

While Revelation sings of women as types (such as, bride, mother, whore) to



discuss salvation and judgment, the women of Genesis appear as specific people with lives and songs of their own. Sarah,

Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, and Tamar have active roles as ancestral matriarchs of Israel. Leah and Jacob's daughter Dinah is raped. Lot's unnamed daughters take unusual steps to guarantee descendants for Lot.

Like us, the women of the Genesis faced complex and difficult decisions. Like us, they acted and suffered and laughed and cried. Their songs are crucial tunes in the musical score of God's people as it is sung in Genesis.

Probably all of us will find Genesis much easier to hear than Revelation. Many of us will find its songs more comforting and inspiring. In part, this is because the situation of the Jews who first heard Genesis is more like ours than that of the Christians who first heard Revelation. Some of us may want the music of Genesis to drown out Revelation. Yet, we need to hear, and sing, both books.

By the Spirit's power, the books of the Bible are filled with different songs for different times. All the songs

have a place in the grand symphony of the people of God. We need to hear Revelation's call to work for justice in a world that can be fearful and demonic, just as we need to hear Genesis' affirmation that creation is good and its care is our responsibility. We need to balance the terror of stories like Dinah's rape with the powerful visions of hope in Revelation. Without Revelation, the music of Genesis is incomplete. Without Genesis, the music of Revelation is incomplete. Different songs for different times—all are part of our story, of the symphony that by God's grace we are privileged to sing in our time and place.

Each year's Bible study offers us the opportunity to sing one part of the grand symphony of the Bible. As we move from the study of Revelation to Genesis, we are invited and challenged to sing loudly the songs of both books. It doesn't matter that sometimes we're a little out of tune. What matters is that, by the Spirit's power, the songs live on in and through our singing. Sing loudly. Sing boldly. The music will carry the songs that by God's grace we are privileged to sing for the sake of God's mission in our world. **LWT**

*Gwen Sayler  
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# IdeaNet

September 1999 • Vol. 3, Number 1

For Mission Together

## Meeting Ideas

*Maxine Gunderson offers this one-woman skit on the theme of forgiveness.  
(Props needed: seven hats and one headband.)*

### My Talking Hats

Let me tell you the story of my talking hats.

It was the week before Easter. I put on this hat (*use a hat that can be pulled down over the ears*) and went to church. The pastor's sermon was on forgiveness. He looked right at me and said, "You must forgive the one who did you wrong." Now how did he know that I hated my sister-in-law? How did he know that she had taken the family ring that should have been mine? And I was to forgive her? I didn't want to listen to that kind of preaching, so I pulled my hat down over my ears. When I got home and took off my hat, it said, "Forgive her, forgive her."

The next day I wore another hat (*put on second hat*) to the senior center to play cards with my friends. I liked to hear the news and gossip. I listened closely as they talked about the kid in school who had been caught with drugs and what a joke that was on his smart-alecky parents. They talked about the couple who had just split up and

about the woman the husband was running around with. They talked about the farmer who was going broke and how if he hadn't been so dumb and bought that fancy machinery, he wouldn't be in this shape now. They talked about others, too, and I tried to remember everything so I could repeat it to someone else. When I got home and took off my hat, it said, "Will those you talked about today forgive you?"

On Tuesday morning I put on this hat (*put on third hat*) to go shopping. When I got to the garage, I saw that my husband had taken my car. Didn't he know I needed my car today? I was furious. I went back into the house and took off my hat. "It's better to forgive than to condemn," it said.

On Wednesday it was raining, so I wore this hat (*put on fourth hat*) when I went shopping. It rained so hard that I got soaked. I blamed God for pouring all that water on me. When I got home and took off my hat, my hat said, "You were baptized with water to cleanse your sins."

(continued)

On Thursday I wore this hat (*put on fifth hat*). Just as I was going outside, the phone rang. It was my dreadful sister-in-law. She said that she hadn't heard from me for a long time and was concerned about me. Was I all right? I was very rude, told her I didn't have time to talk, and hung up. I was so mad! I grabbed my hat, twisted it, and threw it down. And my hat cried.

On Good Friday, I wore this hat (*put on sixth hat*) to church. I listened to the story of Jesus dying on the cross. Jesus forgave those who had persecuted him. He forgave those who put a crown of thorns on his head. He forgave those who nailed him to the cross. And as Jesus was dying, he said, "Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do." When I got home and removed my hat, my hat said, "Jesus forgave much. Can you forgive little?"

On Saturday my head ached, so I put on this headband (*put on headband*). My head hurt when I remembered the sermon last Sunday and how my hat had said, "Forgive her." My head hurt when I remembered Monday and the gossip and my hat's words: "Will they forgive

you?" My head hurt when I remembered Tuesday—how angry I had been at my husband and how my hat had said, "It's better to forgive than to condemn." My head hurt when I remembered Wednesday in the rain and my hat's reminder: "With water your sins are cleansed." My head hurt when I remembered my rudeness to my sister-in-law on Thursday and how my hat had cried. My head hurt when I remembered Good Friday and my hat's question: "Jesus forgave much. Can you forgive little?"

I held my head in my hands and prayed for forgiveness. If God could forgive me, I could forgive others. If God could love me, then I could love others. And when I took off my headband, my headband said, "Amen."

On Easter morning I wore this hat (*put on seventh hat*) to church. It was a beautiful day. Jesus had risen from the dead. I had risen from my sins. My world was filled with joy and love and forgiveness. And when I got home and took off my hat, my hat said, "Hallelujah!"

Maxine Gunderson  
First Lutheran  
Mabel, Minn.

## IdeaNet



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# Postcard Ideas

## Efficient meetings

Our congregational unit meetings run a lot more smoothly and efficiently when the officers and committee chairs do the bulk of the planning in advance to present to the members at monthly meetings. When legwork has begun, it's easy to build on it.

Linda Miller  
Zion Lutheran  
Old Zionsville, Penn.

## Getting off to a good start

I recommend starting out meetings (after an opening Scripture reading and song) with the Bible study first! This works for meetings of our women's group and all church meetings because our minds are then on bigger and greater things, and the business zips right along.

Elizabeth R. Rice  
Sammamish Hills Lutheran  
Redmond, Wash.

## Scheduling for success

Our women's group normally meets at 7:30 in the evening. Because of inclement weather during January and February, however, we have elected to hold our meeting in those months at noon. People bring a sack lunch, and dessert is provided by a committee.

We find that the snowy weather is not quite as ominous in the daytime as at night, and

our attendance has picked up in those months. It works for us!

Wilma McAtee  
Elburn, Ill.

## Potlucks in the South

We in the South are famous for our potlucks! All we need is an event or gathering to show off our cooking skills.

The recipe below is quick and easy to prepare and will be a hit with everyone. After you try it, you will understand why it got its name.

**Mississippi Sin Dip**  
2 8-ounce packages of cream cheese  
16 ounces of sour cream  
12 ounces of shredded cheddar cheese  
2 small cans of chopped green chilies  
4 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce  
6 ounces finely diced ham (or shrimp or crabmeat)  
1 round of Hawaiian bread with the center removed

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Mix all the ingredients together, and place the mixture in the hollow of the bread. Bake for 1 hour.

Dip out with corn chips, crackers, or slices from the center of the Hawaiian bread.

Margaret Scott Lovett  
Good Shepherd Lutheran  
Florence, Ala.

## **"Biblical Women" potluck**

Our group held a fun and educational potluck titled "Little-Known Women of the Bible." Certain women were assigned the names of biblical women we wanted to learn about. After supper, short talks about our "special women" were presented as the program, which was enjoyed by all.

*Jean Harris  
St. Andrew Lutheran  
Parsippany, N.J.*

## **Birthday potluck**

For our birthday potluck night, we had 12 tables decorated for each of the 12 months of the year. A host sat at each one, and participants were asked to sit at the table for their birth month.

After the potluck supper, each table put on a skit about any of the months, and the audience had to guess which month it fit best.

*Elizabeth R. Rice  
Sammamish Hills Lutheran  
Redmond, Wash.*

## **Telephone cheer**

End your telephone conversations with a "God bless you!" It's better than "Have a good day," and the joyful response will gladden your heart.

*Louise Voorhees  
West Trenton, N.J.*

## **Cookie bouquets**

Last Christmas our Women of the ELCA group made "cookie pots" for our shut-ins. We placed cookies with colorful frosting on wooden skewers and used wrapped peppermint candies and colored tissue paper to anchor the skewers in terra-cotta pots. To

personalize the gifts, we made sure that each pot included a cookie with the recipient's name written in icing.

This idea could be used on birthdays, for Valentine's Day or Easter, and so on.

*Gladys Neece  
Oak Cliff Lutheran  
Dallas, Texas*

## **Quilters, take note**

Here's a suggestion for Lutheran World Relief quilters: check with your local hospitals and nursing homes to see how they dispose of their worn blankets. The blankets make great fillers for quilts. Our local hospital is very cooperative.

*Carol Niest  
Sturgeon Bay, Wis.*

## **Crib quilts at baptisms**

Our Women of the ELCA members make crib quilts (45" x 54") for all children under age three at their baptism. It is our welcome to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church. The quilts are useful gifts, not fancy. The parents are very pleased to have such a gift at this special time in their children's lives.

*Amy R. Breisch  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran  
New Glarus, Wis.*

Send all  
**PostCard Ideas**  
to

**Women of the ELCA IdeaNet**  
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Chicago, IL 60631-4189  
Email: IdeaNet@elca.org

# In God's Image: A Study of Genesis

Terence E. Fretheim



## SESSION ■

The morning of the world

## STUDY TEXT

Genesis 1—2

## MEMORY VERSE

"Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over ... the earth.... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27)

## OVERVIEW

The Bible begins with the creation of the entire universe. In these opening chapters, we learn who God is and who we are—in relation to God and to the rest of creation. This is a world filled with all things bright and beautiful.

## OPENING

"All things bright and beautiful,  
all creatures great and small,  
all things wise and wonderful,  
the Lord God made them all.  
God gave us eyes to see them,  
and lips that we might tell  
how great is God Almighty,  
who has made all things well."  
(Refrain and verse 4, *With One Voice* 767)

## THE WONDERS OF CREATION

The reader of Genesis 1—2 must not get lost in questions having to do with history or science. First and foremost,

we are called to pause and wonder at the jewel of a world that God has created. God's creation is, as they say, awesome. Then we should ask how we can follow God's command to take care of this world so that it remains the "very good" creation that God has brought into being. When we have pondered these matters, then we can consider questions about the relationship between these chapters and modern science in more helpful ways. Let's start by thinking about the wonders of God's good creation.

1. Recall the last time you were unusually impressed by the beauty and wonders of creation. What was so captivating? What did you learn—about God, about yourself, about the rest of God's creation?

Because we live in an ecologically sensitive time, you might be tempted to focus only on what is wrong with the creation—such as air and water pollution, loss of topsoil, and the depletion of the ozone layer. Perhaps you will focus on nature's destructive powers, such as floods or droughts or tornadoes. On the other hand, perhaps your walks in nature or your trips to zoos and gardens have reminded you how we are surrounded by incredible goodness and beauty. The opening verses of Genesis ask us to keep this bountiful, flourishing, and complex creation in our minds as we read. God's creation is here for us to enjoy, but God has also commanded us to take good care of it.

#### **AND GOD SAID**

2. **Read Genesis 1:1—2:3.** First of all, we seek to get a sense of this passage as a whole. Some words and phrases are repeated often. What are they? What do they reveal about God or the creation?

In 1:1—2:3, the stages of God's creating are outlined in terms of a seven-day week, ending in the Sabbath day. Think of the many repetitions as refrains, similar to the refrains in many of our hymns. These refrains suggest that this text was used as a hymn perhaps in times of worship. Think of this chapter as a hymn-like depiction of God's creative work similar to the hymns of praise for God's creative work in Psalms 8 (see the refrain in v. 1 and v. 9), 104, and 148. This hymn-like language makes the chapter different from a literal or scientific description. Yet much is revealed about God and the world God brought into being.

Some people may think that the repeated word *good* means perfect, especially since God is the one saying "this is good." However, the command to subdue the earth in 1:28 challenges this understanding. The command to subdue suggests the ideas of development and change. Think of your everyday use of the term "good." To say that "life is good" or "the pie is good" does not mean they are perfect. The "good" evaluation means that God is pleased with the results and that every creature has a high value.

Another repeated word is *day*. Some people have interpreted this as a lengthy period of time. However, the reference to "evening and morning" seems to suggest a 24-hour day (see also Exodus 20:11; 31:17), and this does not fit well with our common idea that the world came into being over a much longer period of time. The relationship between Genesis and modern scientific understandings has been greatly debated.

### 3. How have you made peace with these things? How do you interpret God's part in the creation, given scientific theories of creation? How has your interpretation changed over your lifetime?

Generally, Bible writers used knowledge about the world that was available to them from various sources. The people of Israel had much interest in the exploration of nature (see 1 Kings 4:33-34). Over the years we have gained knowledge

about the world that the authors of Genesis did not have. Yet the basic confession that God is the creator of a good creation will remain the same in every age.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

English Bibles translate Genesis 1:1 in a variety of ways because the original Hebrew language is not always clear. Consider these examples.

**Revised Standard Version:** “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

**New Revised Standard Version:** “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth ...”

We can learn from both of these translations. The RSV translation may be understood as a summary of the chapter (not the first act of creation). Beginning with a summary sentence is a pattern followed by the genealogies later in Genesis (see 5:1; 10:1; 11:10). Genesis 1:2 probably describes the conditions—formless void and darkness—before the creation of light (the NRSV makes this clearer). The wind (or Spirit) of God (1:2) refers to the creative energies of God at work on this raw material.

Many of the creations that follow in Genesis 1:3-27 are drawn from the raw material noted in 1:2. For example, the earth of 1:2 only “appears” in 1:9. It is used by God to create vegetation (1:12), the male (2:7), and the animals (1:24; 2:19). The focus of the chapter is not the absolute origins of all things, but giving order to creation.

Note that, while God usually does the creating, in Genesis 1:11-12 one of the creatures (the earth) brings forth that which is new. God shares the creative process with creatures (see also Genesis 1:20, 24). God will extend that sharing of the creative process to human beings in 1:28.

### **IMAGE AND LIKENESS**

The Hebrew words for *image* and *likeness* aren’t easily translated, but they refer generally to human nature and human responsibility. On the one hand, human beings are enough like God that relationship and communication are possible. Note that both male and female are created in God’s image, so that likeness to God is not exclusively male. The NRSV translation “humankind” captures this well.

Human beings are also given responsibilities—specified in 1:28. To *have dominion* means to rule in such a way that the

creation is cared for rather than exploited. To *subdue the earth* suggests that work remains to be done for the creation to become what God intended it to be. (Note how important the human role is in 2:5; see also 2:15; 3:23.) God also involves human beings in the process of naming (2:19-20), something only God had done earlier (1:5-10). God chooses not to be the only one involved in creating. God shares the capacity for creative activity with the creatures themselves.

**4.** **Look specifically at Genesis 1:26-28.** Human beings (unlike other creatures) are created in the image and likeness of God and are given jobs to do. What are those jobs? What are some of the ways we can obey these commands from God today?

#### **ANOTHER VERSION**

**5. Read Genesis 2:4-25.** What does God create in this section?

These verses do not have the same rhythm, with many repeated words and phrases, that the earlier account has. They are more in the form of a story, which suggests that at one time it may have existed separately from 1:1—2:3 and circulated among the people as good stories do. It tells the story of creation from another angle. Its center of concern is the earth and its inhabitants, rather than the entire universe.

In Genesis 2:9 we hear about two trees. In 2:17, God prohibits eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The issue is not the tree's fruit as such, but what the fruit symbolizes. The phrase *good and evil* is an idiom meaning *everything* (compare to our phrase "lock, stock, and barrel"). To *know* good and evil means to decide by yourself what is in your own best interests, with no limits or boundaries. Not eating of this tree

is a recognition that it is God who truly knows what is in your best interests. The story says that to transgress these boundaries leads to death rather than life.

- 6.** How have you seen the truth of this story in your life? How do you listen for God's will for you? How have you heard it? Think of a time when you listened and heard God's will, or a time when you didn't.

### **THE GIFT OF THE LAW**

The garden of Eden was not a place without commandments, as we have already seen in 1:28. God's law was a part of life before sin entered the world. As such, the law is a gracious gift from God. God gives the law for the sake of life and well-being (clearly stated in Deuteronomy 5:33). The law points out a way for our daily walk that is in the best interests of both ourselves and our neighbors.

We have a tendency to think of law only in negative terms, as something that prevents us from doing what we really would like to do. But God's purpose in setting such limits and boundaries had a positive objective. Think of what a mess our life together would be if there were no laws! Such God-given limits are important if human beings are to remain truly human in God's world.

### **IN PROCESS**

- 7.** **Reread Genesis 2:18-25.** What does God call "not good" (v. 18)? Note that Genesis 1 considers everything "very good."

God evaluates the creation to this point and sees that something is not quite right. This suggests that creation does not come to be all at once. Psalm 104:30 suggests that God's creating work continues long after Genesis. The button slogan "God Is Not Done with Me Yet" can also be said about the entire world.

Genesis 2:19 indicates that God involves the human in that ongoing creative process. The first human names the animals and can choose a proper partner. Note that God addresses the problem by first creating the animals as a helper or partner (2:18). The primary issue is not procreation, but partnership and companionship. Note that the human, not God, decides that the animals will not resolve the problem. So God goes back to the drawing board and creates a woman from the rib (the word *rib* could also be translated as *side*) of the man.

Just because the woman is created from a part of the man does not mean that she is of lesser importance. After all, the man is created from the ground, and he is not of lesser importance than the ground because of that. Moreover, just because the woman was created last in this story does not diminish her status. In Genesis 1, human beings were created last, after everything else.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The way in which 1:26-27 speaks of the creation of humankind indicates that the man and the woman have equal standing in God's good creation. In the next session we will see that sin introduces some changes. Prepare by learning the memory verse: Genesis 6:5. **LWT**

*Terence E. Fretheim is a professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. Pastor Fretheim is the author of *The Suffering of God* (Fortress Press, 1984) and co-author of *The Bible As Word of God* (Fortress Press, 1998). See "When the morning stars sang together," page 7 in this issue, for a related article by the Bible study author.*

*In God's Image* is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Address questions and comments to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

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## A WORD ABOUT THE BIBLE STUDY IN LWT

*In God's Image: A Study of Genesis*, by Terence Fretheim, is a nine-session Bible study appearing in the September 1999 through May 2000 issues of *Lutheran Woman Today*. Genesis is a book about a world, lovingly and stunningly created by God. It's also a book about us, the people who inhabit that world, and about the God who is at work and present among us.

## COMPANION RESOURCES

### UPCOMING BIBLE STUDIES

The June and July/August 2000 issues of LWT will include a three-session Bible study on rest and renewal.

Then in September 2000 through May 2001, readers will enjoy a nine-session joint Bible study with the

Evangelical Lutheran Women in Canada on the book of Acts. These promise to be rich, refreshing studies, with plenty of insight and inspiration to share!

For those who wish to explore the substance of Genesis in greater depth, or who use the Bible study in groups, companion resources are available to enhance and enrich the study of *In God's Image*, including:

- \* **Resource Book.** A valuable learning tool, it contains insights for a deeper exploration of Genesis and its meaning today. Order code 0-8066-3860-5 (\$5.95).
- \* **Leader Guide and audiocassette.** For leaders, it includes leader tips, background information, and answers to questions—everything a leader needs to help a group do the study. This also includes the entire Bible study resource book. The audiotape offers short devotions for each session. Order code 0-8066-3859-1 (\$9.95).
- \* **Companion Bible.** This easy-to-use edition includes the complete text of Genesis and the biblical cross-references used in the Bible study. Order code 0-8066-3861-3 (\$2.95).

To order these companion resources, and learn about others call Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648.

Do you know someone who should be reading *Lutheran Woman Today*? Pass along this helpful subscription information:

LWT comes in three versions: in digest size, in big-print format, and on audiotape (for the visually impaired). Subscribe through your congregation's LWT group coordinator and save—10 issues for just \$9.50. A "group" is five or more subscribers and a congregation may have more than one group. Or order an individual subscription for \$11.50. **Call 800-426-0115, ext. 639, for information about subscribing to LWT**, or to learn how to start a group in your congregation.

# Selecting a book

Linda Post Bushkofsky



Just how do book groups put together a reading list?

Some groups allow each participant to select a book in turn. Other groups invite each participant to recommend titles to appear on a ballot, and the books receiving the most votes are selected for the coming year.

Some groups use themes—biographies one year, books by a particular author the next year. I know of oth-

ers that make their selections from the many books reviewed in this column. Whatever method you choose, here are some resources you might find helpful.

Several handy guidebooks are available, many of which include reading lists as well as information on how to begin and maintain a book group. You might consider *The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Start Your Own Book Club*, by Rachel W. Jacobsohn (Hyperion 1998), *The Reading List: Contemporary Fiction*, by David Rubel (Owl Books, 1998), and *The Reading Group Book: The Complete Guide to Starting and Sustaining a Reading Group, with Annotated Lists of 250 Titles for Provocative Discussion*, by David Laskin and Holly Hughes (Plume, 1995).

Consider *Book* magazine. It includes author profiles, articles about trends, excerpts, and more. Selected articles and reviews from the printed edition are also available at the magazine's Web site at [bookmagazine.com](http://bookmagazine.com).

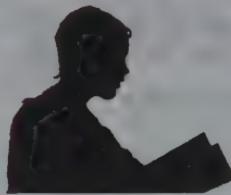
BookBrowser is a helpful Web site. This collection of fiction reading lists ([www.bookbrowser.com](http://www.bookbrowser.com)) includes book reviews, forthcoming titles, and author information.

Maybe you'd like to plan a year's reading of Pulitzer Prize-winning books. Go to [www.pulitzer.org](http://www.pulitzer.org) and click on "1999" for a list of this year's winners.

Putting together a list of books may seem daunting at first, but that shouldn't stop you from organizing a book group. Consider *Listening for God* (volumes 1 and 2), a resource on contemporary literature and the life of faith, available from Augsburg Fortress (800-328-4648). With *Listening for God*, you can read works from Annie Dillard, Alice Walker, Garrison Keillor, John Updike, Gail Godwin, Kathleen Norris, and others. Each volume offers a collection of eight pieces from contemporary writers, reflection questions, and brief author profiles. A leader guide with session study plans is available, as is a video introducing the authors. Because the readings are not lengthy, this is an ideal resource for an eight-week adult forum or even a weekend retreat.

#### HAVE A REVIEW YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

You can reach "Bookmarks" columnist Linda Post Bushkofsky via email at [linda.post.bushkofsky@pcusa.org](mailto:linda.post.bushkofsky@pcusa.org) or in care of the LWT editorial office (see p. 49).



**A Live Coal  
in the Sea**  
By Madeleine  
L'Engle.  
Farrar,  
Straus, and  
Giroux, 1996.

*Reviewed by Rose Wood Trenbeath Cavalier, N.D.*

This complex story of long-kept, explosive family secrets unfolds when Raffi Xanthakos confronts her grandmother, Dr. Camilla Dickinson, about her ancestry. Raffi's question and the ensuing answers test the faith, love, and loyalty of this family.

The astronomer in Camilla knows why the eyes see things upside-down. It's something she's explained to several generations of children. What she can't explain is why circumstances in life turn upside-down. As she sifts through her experiences and tells Raffi the story of her parents, she focuses on how things turn right-side-up through forgiveness and mercy.

Madeline L'Engle artfully tells this family story with vivid images of faith and love, including a child's confident prayers for the impossible, a loving touch from aging hands, a young girl's courage to seek the truth regardless of cost, and God's healing work in the lives of God's troubled children.

Some readers might find the brief references to infidelity and sexuality disturbing, but the novel's strong message of mercy and forgiveness overshadows those references. The novel is, after all,

a family story, and not all of family life is pretty.

### FOR REFLECTION

1. Why is identity so important to the human experience? How does faith affect how we define ourselves?
2. This novel examines success and failure in relationships. What are the necessary ingredients in those relationships that endure?



*Amazing Grace:  
The Vocabulary  
of Faith*  
By Kathleen  
Norris.  
Riverhead Books,  
1999.

Reviewed by Karen Ball  
Oakland, Calif.

In *Amazing Grace: The Vocabulary of Faith*, Kathleen Norris discusses specific theological, dogmatic, and doctrinal issues that can be an impediment, keeping people from fully embracing the Christian faith. Norris takes the church's vocabulary—using words such as *Antichrist*, *heresy*, *reprobate*, and *judgment*—and defines and explains the words through stories. She tackles subjects like belief, doubt, and sacred ambiguity; intolerance and forbearance; and the role of imagination in Christianity.

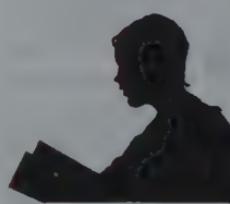
In the preface, Norris says the vocabulary of faith begins when the child first learns to say "yes" rather than "no"—"To say 'yes' is to make

a leap of faith, to risk oneself in a new and often scary relationship." She then goes on to recount her own experience with saying both "yes" and "no" and the consequences of each.

Norris takes trips into the territory of physics, mathematics, feminism, and poetry, but ends where she began—affirming the real power of language to heal if we only have the faith that it can.

### FOR REFLECTION

1. Norris says she doesn't expect the church to give up its traditional language to make her more comfortable. What do you believe is the church's responsibility to be hospitable in the use of language?
2. For Norris, doubt is the "seed of faith." What do you think she means? How have you experienced doubt as a way of growing your own faith?



*A Tree Full  
of Angels:  
Seeing the  
Holy in the  
Ordinary*  
By MacRina  
Wiederkehr,  
OSB.

Harper, San Francisco, 1988, 1990.  
Reviewed by Elin Stetz  
Corvallis, Ore.

Though a Benedictine nun, MacRina Wiederkehr experiences many of the same frustrations that

clutter our lives: busyness, hurry, concern with possessions, and discouragement. Reading Wiederkehr's *A Tree Full of Angels* is like visiting with a dear friend who shares the joys and sorrows of her spiritual journey with you and invites you to reflect on your own journey.

Central to the book is a discussion of the centuries-old discipline of *lectio divina* (Latin for "sacred reading"). This slow, meditative, personal way of reading can bring a wonderful freshness and immediacy to one's encounter with the scriptures. Wiederkehr invites the reader into the actual experience of this kind of meditation by sharing portions of her prayer journal.

It is difficult to hurry through this book. One lingers and savors this "spiritual friend."

### FOR REFLECTION

1. Spend one day deliberately gathering "crumbs" of blessings. Give thanks. Reflect on the experience in your journal.
2. Look through one day's mail in the spirit of "finding God in the mailbox." **LWT**

*LWT columnist Linda Post Bushkofsky is associate synod executive for communication and interpretation for Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church U.S.A. She and her husband, Dennis, are members of St. Stephen Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn.*

# For all of our life

*Paul R. Nelson*



Among the precious gifts of the Gospel is the sacrament of Holy Baptism. This sacrament is about relationships. It proclaims God's relationship to each person who is baptized. It proclaims God's relationship to the people who are called together in the church. It also offers the promise of new relationships to those who have not yet been baptized but who are also valued and loved by God.

Most Lutherans today were baptized as infants. Our parents and sponsors or godparents brought us to church to receive God's promise in water and the Word. The pastor

poured the water and spoke the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." God claimed us as sons and daughters. Living as a baptized child of God was only just beginning! Learning to sing the hymns of the church, falling in love with the stories of the Bible, worshiping with the congregation, studying the catechism, and growing in relationships to other baptized people is a life-long journey.

## ADULT BAPTISM

Baptism is not only for infants. More and more adults and young people who have not already been baptized are coming to the church. More Lutheran congregations are intentionally reaching out to people who are not baptized or acquainted with the traditions of the church. To honor their experience and to help them to make a commitment to Christ, the church provides a time for them to inquire into the faith of the church in Jesus Christ. It helps them to consider accepting the gift of Holy Baptism step by step. When God's Spirit moves them to say they are ready, they are welcomed to Christ in Holy Baptism.

Rather than baptizing first and teaching afterward, the church begins teaching first for these adults and then baptizes them. This allows people who are not baptized to explore the relationships that God uses to build the church. Baptism becomes a turning point in their lives when God begins a new relationship with them.

The educational ministry of our congregations can be understood as a part of the commitments the church makes in Holy Baptism to help people grow in faith—our relationship to God—and in relationship to other Christians. Congregations committed to reaching out to those who are not yet baptized will find special help in a pattern of preparation called the *adult catechumenate*. Catechumenate is another form of the word we know in "catechism." It refers to a time of study rather than a book to study from. Both words are based on the Greek expression for "sounding or echoing in the ear." It is a good word that captures the way God works to form us.

## REACHING OUT

To be a congregation that baptizes adults takes a specific commitment. Adults who are not baptized need to be invited and welcomed by the congregation. Making public your interest in these people, and your commitment to them, is important. How else will they find you?

Reaching out means being willing to mentor people in Christian living and faith. It means more than an invitation to "attend the pastor's new-member class." People who are learning about Baptism need a safe environment for asking basic questions. These people are not just joining a church—they are becoming Christians. They will need the help of the entire congregation to do that, not just the pastor.

Where do we find unbaptized people? They are all around us and

close at hand. In your own extended family there may be someone not yet baptized. In the place where you work, people may be awaiting a welcoming word. Friends of friends who may not have thought about this for a long time may be waiting for the invitation. Your ministry in daily life is the witness they are looking to. Does your community know that your congregation wants a relationship with people inquiring about Baptism?

### ONCE-AND-FOR-ALL BAPTISM

Sometimes people wonder if they need to be baptized again if they join a congregation of another denomination. If a person who is a Methodist or Roman Catholic or Presbyterian joins an ELCA congregation, they do not have to be baptized again. Baptism doesn't make us Lutheran, or any one denomination—it makes us Christ's. We are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—not into the name of this or that church. Baptism is once for all. This is true not because of us, but because God's promise to us in Baptism is rock-solid and never-failing.

### HOW TO BAPTIZE

When we celebrate Baptism it should be in the worship service of the congregation and should show the wonder of God's promise. In "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," Martin Luther said: "We seek to celebrate Baptism in such a way that the celebration is a true and complete sign of the things

which Baptism signifies." What should Baptism signify? The Bible gives us several descriptions of what Baptism means: it is dying and rising with Christ; it is rebirth in the Spirit of God; and it is cleansing from sin.

To signify these wonderful things God asks us to use water and the Word. We encourage congregations to use water in plentiful measure that communicates dying and rising again. More and more Lutheran congregations are building baptismal fonts that hold large quantities of water and even that have running water in them. This allows for the going down into the water that shows the sign of being buried with Christ in a death like his, and being raised to a new life like his. *Lutheran Book of Worship* also encourages other signs: anointing with oil; receiving a lighted candle (page 124).

### DAY BY DAY

We who are baptized live every day in light of this. "There are many ways to encourage this daily dying to sin and being raised to life before God. They include confession and absolution, the reading of the Scriptures, preaching, mutual comfort and consolation of the sisters and brothers, daily prayers and the sign of the cross, the remembrance of the catechism, and the profession of the creed" (*Use of the Means of Grace* 17B). **LWT**

*Paul Nelson is director for worship in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries.*

# WANT TO KNOW MORE? EXPLORE THESE RESOURCES



## ON VIDEO

**Welcome to Christ: Preparing Adults for Baptism and Discipleship.** Division for Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Augsburg Fortress order code: 34-9043-2100. \$19.95 plus shipping and handling.

## These Things Matter: Word, Baptism, Communion.

Video reflections on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's *Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. Division for Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Order from Augsburg Fortress: ISBN 6-0000-9044-7. \$19.95 plus shipping and handling.



## BOOKS

**The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.** Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997. Order from Augsburg Fortress: ISBN 0-8066-3648-3. \$4.95 plus shipping and handling.

**Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Introduction to the Catechumenate.** Order from Augsburg Fortress: ISBN 0-8066-3393-X. \$8.95 plus shipping and handling.

For any of the above resources,  
call Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648.

# “There, but for the grace of God...”

*Susan Gamelin*

**How can anyone say that?**

I grew up with a sweet dad. The biceps he'd let my sister and me dangle from when we were young were shaped at his welder's station on the night shift at the plant and at his carpenter's bench in the basement during the days. A big Swede, he was and is a sweet man.

Nowhere was that sweetness more heart-piercingly clear than those times when someone in a wheelchair was pushed past us girls. "There, but for the grace of God, go I," he would say, shaking his head. And he would add, "Poor soul." Our eyes would grow big, and we would try not to stare at this person who had somehow or other fallen out of grace and into a wheelchair.

When I became a teenager, I would challenge my dad about this topic. "You mean God doesn't love them?" I would ask, tauntingly. I knew that my dad didn't mean that. I watched him loving these "poor souls" in Jesus' name, driving a van full of blind folks every Wednesday for years, and sending me across the alley with Valentine's candy for the shut-in whose house reeked with the odor of bladder and bowel gone bad. My questions grew out of the troubling in my mind even more than they grew out of teenage surliness. I was trying to work out a problem that I still haven't figured out completely: suffering.

## **SUFFERING**

Why does suffering happen to some and not to all? Why are there wheelchair-bound kids, and kids whose legs pump madly as they race down the block? Why the woman shut-in with the decay of disease and my father hitting his first hole-in-one just before his 80th birthday? "There, but for the grace of God, go I"?? Why would God grace some kids, some adults, some newborns—and not others? And what did it mean about God and me when I was wheelchair-bound the summer before sixth grade,

following a collision with a kid on a motorcycle?

I still trouble over the familiar saying "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It's often spoken with the authority of scripture, even though it's not in the Bible I read every day. (It must be part of that missing book, "Hezekiah," where other well-loved sayings—"God helps those who help themselves" and "Cleanliness is next to godliness"—are found.) "There, but for the grace of God go I." I argue with it and with myself. How can anyone say that? How can anyone not?

You see, there is truth in the saying. Jesus did bring a dead 12-year-old girl back to life. And on his way to that girl's deathbed, an old woman reached out of her bleeding misery to let the fringe of his garment brush over her and heal her. Jesus' healing, God's grace. Alleluia! But that day in Israel, faithfully recorded in Mark 5:21-43, other 12-year-olds died and other women sat alone and unhealed. My dad is right.

#### **GRACE**

But he's also wrong. There is another truth that is greater. God's grace cushions our wheelchairs and sweetens our aloneness.

I saw that most vividly the week I interviewed World War I veterans for a study that a local college was doing. One Wednesday I talked with a veteran in a boarding house who was in perpetual search of a doctor who would tell him that he was sick. Not one would. "There go I, outside of God's grace," was his grumpy mantra.

Thursday I was ushered into the home of another World War I vet. He was lying on a chaise lounge, unable to sit erect. His wife had just finished shaving him and feeding him breakfast. He had Parkinson's disease. "Status of your health?" I asked when I reached that part of the questionnaire. "Very good!" he responded immediately, but then paused for a moment, "I guess I'd better not say excellent."

There with the grace of God, go we. **LWT**

***How can anyone not?***

*Susan Gamelin, an ELCA pastor, is an assistant to the Bishop of the Southeastern Synod. She and her husband, Tim, live in Atlanta. Her sweet Swede dad and mom live in Punta Corda, Fla.*

# God's creation, God's creatures

*Readers share their experience of God revealed in nature, and God revealed through pets.*



## NIGHT-SKY PRAYER

Dad had a love of nature and was a real resource on everything around us, everything that the Creator had made. I remember Dad showing me things like the little bumps on the leaves of our Hackberry tree. He knew all the constellations and where to find the North Star. It was these times, being outside with Dad, investigating minute things or gazing at the night sky, that gave me an

increasing sense of awe, when I realized how God provides for the smallest of creatures and yet how huge our universe is.

Even today when I gaze at the night sky, I almost always think of God. It feels as if there is nothing between God and me when I am outside on a clear night. Prayer just flows out of me. If I am confused, thankful, angry, ashamed, feeling blessed, or worried—whatever is on my mind comes to the surface and I am talking to God.

If I give myself enough time for two-way communication, I can discern what God wants to say to me. How

do I know? It is often a thought that would not have occurred to me; it is usually something that will benefit someone; and at the end of the "conversation," I have a sense of peace about what I need to do.

*Char Stone  
Webster City, Iowa*



### **CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE**

A few years ago some women from our church went on a retreat. One morning I got up before the sun rose. I hiked up to a big rock outcropping over a valley with a pond. I sat there listening to the birds, watching the mist in the valley, and noticing the color changes as the sun got closer to the horizon. In a bright blast the sun came into sight. The sudden warmth penetrated my

clothes. The leaves were as colorful as a stained-glass window.

I stood up and felt the sun—it was so bright that I turned around. Imagine my surprise to see the moon in the sky on the other side, and my shadow across the trees on the next hill. As I watched my shadow—my image—God's image, a feeling of being one with creation swelled inside me.

*Patricia Swan  
Madison, Wis.*

### **PRAYERS ON THE WIND**

When I entered the hospital several years ago for major surgery, my husband and I went to the chapel for prayer before being taken to my room. Later I found that it was as though God heard those prayers and blew them on the winds and sent them to people who touched our lives in many ways. I received cards and telephone calls and well-wishes from so many people. I wondered how they had heard about my surgery.

The day I was to come home from the hospital, my then 12-year-old son called to tell me I had a present from God that I would see when I arrived home. As I walked up the sidewalk to our front door I saw that my son had put a sign—GIFT FROM GOD—on a rose bush. The first rosebush in the newly planted garden showed a lovely red rose, the



first of the season. What a wonderful homecoming!

Thank you, God, for the prayers blown in the winds, and thank you for the gift of healing.

*Lu Moller  
Richmond, Va.*

### **GOD'S MIRACLES**

As a child I loved to lie in the grass and watch the clouds go by, and I lived—with a book—in our apple tree. What a marvelous world God made for a kid! Warm days, starry nights. Watching thunderstorms from my bed, waiting—willing it—to light up the sky again.

Sixty years, a husband, four kids, a farm, and 11 grandkids later, I still love it! This family and this place. Nature is the visual proof of God's presence in my life.

Driving the tractor gives me time for one-on-one with God. Back and

forth across the field; the sky, fields, trees—awesome as they reach forever. Singing praises, offering prayers. Sometimes thanks for the bounty of my life, sometimes a plea for a friend. Always in awe at what God has done for me.

Seasons change, seeds are planted, rain comes, sun warms the earth; plants sprout, grow, blossom; grain ripens, dries, is harvested. God is in charge.

Piglets are born, little fat solid bodies fight for "a parkin' place" along the sow. Calves come in early cold; get up, wander about, find the cow, suckle. Mama lows worriedly or contentedly and cleans the little guy with her rough black tongue. Our children are born, grow up, and come home again with children of their own. All are God's miracles!

We thank you, Lord, for the bounty you pour out on us daily, for the sights, sounds, smells, and colors of your creation!

*Gloria Current  
Rosewood, Ohio*





### MAGGIE'S MISSION

"Maggie," our 14-year-old Yorkshire terrier, is made of 6 pounds of pure, unadulterated love covered with silky-soft black-and-tan hair. Maggie came to live with us when she was 4 years old, having been neglected and abused. It would have been understandable if she had been sullen or fearful, but she was not. She was just filled with boundless love.

In fact, there was so much love in this little ball of fur that we decided it wasn't fair to keep it all to ourselves. So on a nice spring day Maggie and I went visiting at a local nursing home. In the recreation room, we found about 50 residents sitting around large round tables. Some were watching the news on television, most were just sitting. The room was very quiet.

Maggie and I made the rounds of the room. We stopped to talk for a little while at each table. I held Maggie close to each person so they could pet her if they wanted. Most of them did, and many wanted to hold

her on their laps. Some didn't want to let her go! Maggie wagged her little stump of a tail, wiggled all over, and loved them all. The room began to buzz with excitement.

Leaving through the front entrance, I saw that a few residents had been taken outside to enjoy the fresh air. With Maggie in my arms, I stopped at each wheelchair for a moment to talk and let them pet Maggie. Then I noticed one last patient, whose chair had been pushed a little farther away from the others. She was propped up and strapped into the wheelchair, and sat unmoving with a vacant, far-away look in her eyes.

I hesitated just a moment, then bent over and asked her if she liked animals. A middle-aged man sitting nearby said, "My mother can't speak to you. She hasn't responded to anything in many months." But Maggie was already sniffing and nuzzling the lady's hand, so I lifted her hand and gently placed it on Maggie's soft back. The hand lay still, but slowly a beautiful, toothless smile spread over the lady's face, and the light of recognition began to glow in her eyes.

Her son's voice broke when he said, "Thank you. I thought I'd never see my mother smile again." My eyes were filled with tears, and I couldn't even answer. All I could do was give them both—mother and son—a hug. And one for Maggie, whose mission for the day was accomplished.

*Pat Waldron  
Paradise, Calif.*

## CIRCLE OF HEALING

When my husband, Jim, was 8 years old, he became gravely ill with whooping cough. The doctor expressed deep concern about Jim's survival. His parents kept a constant prayer vigil at his bedside. One evening a high fever, bone-rattling chills, and hallucinations devastated his emaciated body. Jim's grandmother frantically phoned the doctor to say, "All the fight seems to have left Jimmy." The doctor came right over. Jim had a serious complication to the whooping cough—pneumonia. The doctor said, "If he lives through the night it will be a miracle. His survival is in the hands of the Great Physician." In those pre-antibiotic days, there was nothing more they could do.

In the early morning hours Jim's fever broke. When the doctor stopped by, his verdict was: "Jimmy is out of immediate danger, but a hard road lies ahead in his recuperation. He needs something to spark his interest in living." Without a word, Dad hurried from the room. He returned a few hours later carrying a blanket. As Dad laid the blanket on top of his son, Jim protested, "I'm already too warm." The words were barely formed when a black wet nose poked out from the cover. Jim's face was licked with a tickling tongue.

They had no trouble choosing a name for the puppy. "Mutt and Jeff" was Jim's favorite comic strip. Since the pure-bred beagle was not a "Mutt," he had to be a "Jeff." In the days that followed, Jeff lured Jim out into the warm spring sunshine

by tugging at his sleeve. The energetic puppy would not let Jim retreat from life. He became the first in a succession of dogs named Jeff.

Forty years later when Jim's mother died, Dad floundered in depression. We decided it was time for another Jeff. Jim located a gentle 9-year-old Brittany spaniel that needed a home. We brought the dog to Dad's house. Our surprise was met with resistance and arguments. Jeff took matters into his own paws. He licked Dad's hand, looking at his new master with total adoration. He chose Dad. For the next three years Jeff and Dad were inseparable.

When Dad was hospitalized with a stroke, his greatest concern was Jeff. We took Jeff into our home. As Dad's hospitalization lengthened into weeks, Dad missed his pal. He was listless and indifferent to his rehabilitation. Jim realized Dad needed a visit from Jeff. Early one Sunday morning, Jim smuggled the shampooed dog through the hospital corridors to Dad's room. As Jeff caught Dad's scent he bounded out of his blanket and up onto Dad's lap. Jeff covered Dad's face and hands with dog kisses. Dad's smile stretched widely across his face. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he choked out, "Jeff, you're the best medicine of all." The gift Dad had given his son many years before had been returned to him.

*Ellen Fackler Gamrath  
Mercer Island, Wash.*

## GOOD SHEPHERD-Y!

Sillius Payton Davenport III came to live with us with neither my permission nor my blessing. When my daughter Andrea was 17, she and her friend Rachael bought each other Indonesian Box Turtles for their birthdays. We found out about it after the fact.

The turtles were to live together at Rachael's. It lasted less than two weeks. Rachael's turtle died and Silly had to come home. I determined to stay out of the care and loving of a small, non-responsive, shelled animal.

Silly lived in a make-do gerbil house with her own electric rock. She walked through a salad of cucumber and banana. Nobody knew how much she ate. Mostly she just sat by her rock.

Months later, Andrea read in a newspaper veterinary column that turtles need an annual examination, just like other pets. My response was in keeping with my resolve: "You bought her, you make the appointment, you pay for it."

Returning from the turtle doctor, Andrea walked into the kitchen while I was cooking dinner. I looked over my shoulder and said, "So, how's Silly?" The shaky voice answered, "She's dying. She's anorexic."

With all the motherly tenderness I could muster through my giggle I asked, "How can you tell! Where is she?" "She's in a humidified incubator in the vet's office and he is going to force-feed her." This was getting



*Jane and Silly*

serious. "Andrea," I asked sternly, "how much is this costing?"

Silly weighed 4 ounces, she had pneumonia and parasites and a fungus on her face. She spent several days in her hospital box getting daily antibiotic shots. The forced feeding only worked once, because after that she never put her head out of her shell! Still determined to stay out of it, I went off to my synodical women's organization convention where I laughed with my friends about the turtle. When I returned home, so had Silly, but she still wasn't eating.

I went out for my run that first day back and found earthworms along the street from an overnight rain. Remembering that turtles like to eat them, I picked up a couple and took them home. I put them in her box and she just sat there looking very much like a rock. Then my nurturing instincts took over. What can't be forced might be coaxed.

With the turtle on a towel, I sat at my kitchen table slicing worms into

bite-size pieces and flipping them with a toothpick to simulate movement. All the while I coaxed, "Come on, Silly, eat your worms, you can do it, be a good girl and eat." And she ate. Three times each day for several weeks we did this, and she kept eating.

On a weekend in October, I went away to a meeting, leaving Andrea to feed the turtle. When I returned I was met with the anxious report: "Silly's not eating." "Of course, she is," I replied. "She was eating when I left. What's different now?" I got out the towel and the toothpicks and the earthworms and she ate!

The next day when I took her for another antibiotic shot, I said to the veterinarian sheepishly, "Please tell me that turtles don't bond to people's voices." His answer didn't surprise me. "I've seen it happen with my own turtles," he said.

There was danger in such closeness. I had to give up being the sole human with whom she related; I had to teach her to eat without my prompting. It was important that she be "her own turtle."

Silly and I still belong to each other. I carried her on the plane in the pocket of my blazer when she went to live with Andrea at college, and I brought her home when she wasn't getting enough attention! She has her house in my kitchen. We now have a routine of caring and sharing that no longer involves earthworms. I hold her, and she puts out her head to be stroked. She swims in the bathroom sink and looks up at me as I talk to her.

This experience with Silly brings to mind my relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. I am bathed in the waters of Baptism. I am fed by the hand of God, and as often as I avail myself, I am nourished at the table laid for me by Jesus Christ. I am carried in a pocket close to the heart of God. I am loved by a gracious God with whom there is no danger in closeness, and empowered to be my own person within the family of God.

All this I knew, but each time I interact with a 7-ounce turtle I am poignantly reminded who I am and whose I am.

*Jane Herre Erdahl  
Salt Lake City, Utah LWT*

#### UPCOMING READER CALLS

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